

1636 - The "first" strike in what was to be the United States occurred on Richmond Island, off the coast of Maine, when workmen and fishermen protested against the withholding of their wages for a year. The bound workmen and fishermen "fell into mutiny," entered into a "Consort ship," and mass desertions occurred. John Winter, overseer of the island, issued an "order along the Cost [coast] that no man shall entertaine them." Winter stated that in order to be freed from their contracts, other workers made "stryfe" to compel him to "turne them away." Winter advised his London employer, Robert Trelawny, that in the future he should bind his workers by "sumsion"—a contract which stipulated a penalty for non-fulfillment. Again, Winter could be heard complaining that "they ar all gathered in a head togeather heare," and he was compelled to send home a brewer lest he "poyson som of men on[e] tyme or other yff he had stayed heare with us." (While the first dispute that might be called a strike occurred in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, when Polish workers protested against being denied the suffrage, the strike did not spring from economic grievances. In response to the action of the Polish workers, the Council of London conceded to their demands. The Records of the Virginia Company of London declared that "they shalle be enfranchised and made as free as any inhabitant there." The strikers of Richmond Island, however, can lay claim to the first strike that can be traced to working conditions.)

From a "Time-Line of Selected Highlights of Maine Labor History: 1636-2015" by Dr. Charles Scontras, 2016.